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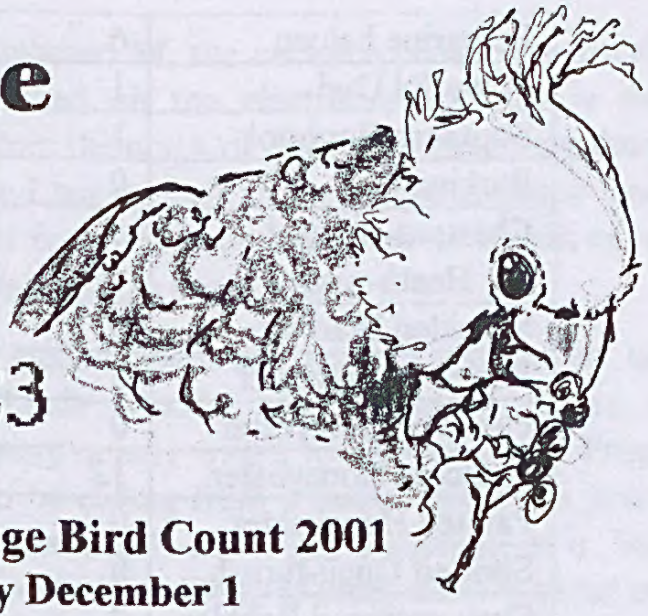

BOCA Challenge Bird Count 2001
Saturday December 1

Objective To count, not only the species of birds but the actual numbers within a 40 km radius of Castlemaine. The count is done simultaneously throughout Melbourne, country Victoria, NSW and Queensland by various groups, to provide a guide to numbers and distribution of our bird population.

Wanted 10 - 12 observers (minimum needed to cover the area thoroughly). You don't have to be an expert Ibirdol - each group will have a qualified leader, but you must be able to count to over 10!!!

When? Saturday December 1. Times and further details later.

For any further enquiries ring Ken or Maureen Dredge on 5470 6474.

Some results and observations from last year's count

We only had five observers last year, so we were very restricted as to the area we could cover. However, the results were very pleasing, with 103 species recorded for a total count of 1,580 birds.

- Overall count for all areas surveyed was 398 species for a total count of 165,430 birds
- Victorian country recorded 272 species for 78,572 birds

The following are some interesting observations from the over all count:-

Species	Melb.	Vic country	NSW	Q'land	Total
Cattle Egret	0	2	0	2,927	2,929
Australian Shelduck	5,529	2,506	0	0	8,035
Pink-eared Duck	4,151	102	0	0	4,253
Freckled duck	0	0	0	0	0
Brolga	0	16	0	267	283
Wedge-tailed Eagle	7	30	0	2	39

Peregrine Falcon	6	11	0	0	17
Powerful Owl	1	2	0	0	3
Southern Boobook	1	8	0	4	13
Barking Owl	0	0	0	5	5
Chestnut-rumped Heath-wren	0	1	0	0	1
Speckled Warbler	0	5	0	0	5
Regent Honeyeater	0	0	0	0	0
Fuscous Honeyeater	0	157	0	0	157
Crescent Honeyeater	12	1	0	0	13
Painted Honeyeater	0	6	0	0	6
Spotted Quail-thrush	0	1	0	0	1
Grey-crowned Babbler	0	16	0	24	40
Flame Robin	3	0	0	0	3
Scarlet Robin	8	5	0	0	13
Hooded Robin	0	12	0	0	12
Crested Bellbird	0	10	0	0	10

Maureen and Ken Dredge

Pomonal Campout

What luck with the weather nine of us had while enjoying a wonderfully varied choice of activities over 4 days. The camping ground had a beautiful backdrop of Redman Bluff and other peaks, which were enhanced at sunrise (for those of us who surfaced early to birdwatch!) and sunset.

The highlight for most of us was an afternoon at The Nook Flora Reserve in Moyston guided by Tristan Kennedy. There were carpets of orchids; *Thelymitra antenifera* (Rabbits Ears) were in great numbers, *and there were Cyrtostylus reniformis* (Small Gnat Orchid), Greenhoods - Tall, Dwarf and Nodding - and many others. It was difficult to put one's foot down without treading on an orchid or other wildflowers.

The owners of the Grampians Paradise Camping and Caravan Parklands, the Banfields, whose family have been in the area since 1910, had a wealth of knowledge to share. Tom guided us to a spot off Redman Road, through a steep gully, negotiating rocks and fallen logs, to find Maidenhair Ferns, Necklace Ferns, Hard Water-ferns, Austral Bracken, and soft Tree-ferns. As we were about to leave the gully George Broadway and I thought we heard a Crescent Honeyeater amongst the calls of several Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. We determined that we would return early the next morning to confirm this! Where we rejoined the road where a small creek flowed down the hill there was a rock formation which was covered by an amazing curtain of Coral Ferns.

Bird species for the camp numbered 54, the cuckoos being very vocal. Three Fantail Cuckoos were perched on the electric wires outside the camping area calling persistently from the crack of dawn. On observing them more closely we realized their food source was in the paddock below and they would dive down regularly for food, then continue their persistent calls. (The bird list is available if you would like to see it. Ed.)

Frogs were very vocal in the wetland areas around the campsite, so, on our last evening Lachlan and Linda Moody and I decided to do a "frog-watch". We sat by the lake very quietly with a torch. The Banjo Frog, or Eastern Pobblebonk, seemed to be calling from a tunnel under the grass where we were sitting, but we unfortunately didn't get a sighting of it. We could hear four different calls, but were not able to identify them without an expert with us.

A big "Thank you" to Rita for organizing this camp. A pity she wasn't able to join us until the Saturday.

Margaret Badminton

And also.....

Tom and Aileen Banfield had a "holiday" - showing us around and sharing their dreams for the place.

On Saturday afternoon we all, including Aileen, went to the Morullah Gardens Nursery where Jenny Heyme, and a couple of the children, conducted us around part of the huge planted area where flowers, including many Banksia species, are grown for the cut flower market, the nursery, the bush behind the property, and entertained us to afternoon tea, with an apple cake made using some of their heritage apples! At the end I think probably only Lachlan and Jenny were still going strong!

I joined George and Margaret early on Sunday morning on the hunt for the Crescent Honeyeaters. We did spot them, and realised that the half call that they were making was coming apparently from juveniles.

Everyone seems to have had a very enjoyable and relaxing time, and I'm just glad to have been able to introduce people to the area, albeit by proxy for the first couple of days!

Rita Mills

Fern Walk

On Saturday 29/10/01 Tom took several of us along Redman track to see the ferns. We followed Long Gully Creek. The forest was warm and moist with a lot of Bracken and tall trees. We crossed the creek several times before coming across tree ferns, Water Ferns and a huge wall of Coral Ferns.

Lachlan Moody

"Wonderful Wooli"

Three years after our first visit to this area on the coast of the Yuraygir National Park in northern NSW (CN 246, July '98) we returned for three weeks during July/August this year. Previously we were there in Autumn, but this year the birds observed were mostly permanent residents and the migratory birds were just appearing, the Spangled Drongos being first.

After spending the night at Coffs Harbour, where we met a daughter from Newcastle, we drove north along the Pacific Highway next morning for a couple of hours before reaching the turn-off for Wooli via the Pillar Valley road. As we approached the town outskirts we stopped at the roadside to check out the Osprey nest on the tall power transformer platform, and were dismayed to find it greatly reduced in size and no birds around. Our landlady explained on our arrival that the locals assumed the Power authorities had been over enthusiastic in their annual reduction of the nest height and had made angry phone calls to the Grafton office, which denied the allegations. Employees of North Power were sent to inspect the damage and reassure the residents who soon recognised that the severe gales experienced about that time had blown the nest apart. Happily, we were still there when the Ospreys returned soon after and continued re-building as the breeding season approached. It is unusual for Osprey nests to be blown down, but the weather had been extreme this year.

The flat in which we stayed is a short distance from the Wooli-Wooli River mouth on the Tasman Sea, with only the width of the main road between us and the bank of the estuary. We were in a good position to watch the raptor pairs - Osprey, Sea Eagles, Brahminy Kites and occasional Whistling Kites patrol the river and ocean beach which was overlooked by sand dunes 100 metres to the rear of the flat. Gannets, terns and gulls also hunted and dived off shore.

The Large number of Pelicans, cormorants, egrets and Pacific Herons were still on the river and when the sand flats were exposed at low tide Pied and Sooty Oyster-catchers, along with Eastern Curlews, were regularly seen feeding.

During our stay there were a couple of days of gale force winds and a few showers. On the coastal walking track at nearby Wilsons Point the wild seas crashing against the high cliffs were spectacular, and the ocean views magnificent. We came to a sheltered dune lake where a Hoary Headed Grebe

was feeding peacefully and a pair of Pacific Black Ducks, buffeted by the strong winds, seemed to be blown backwards in their efforts to land. Still in the shelter of the dunes we crossed the small creek which fed the lake where masses of Ivy-leaved Violets in full bloom were covering the banks. Also in the area were occasional Wild Raspberry shrubs with a few small delicious ripe fruit.

We met some Emus wandering along which politely stepped aside into the heaths for us to pass. The track follows the exposed cliff tops towards Diggers Rest camping and picnic area. Pandanus grows on the face of the cliffs, and it was astonishing to find some heathland shrubs and large clumps of Flannel Flowers flourishing and blooming in the fine salty spray that drifted to the top of the cliff. In another spot a small creek tumbled down to the sea below, with many ferns, including tree ferns and Maidenhair Fern, thriving in the same salty conditions.

There were several families of Red-backed Wrens which seemed to favour cliff top living in the small shrubs which also grew on the face of the cliffs. They were not fond of windy weather and the males were elusive, but the females and juveniles were always curious about our movements.

After the showery day the swampy areas around the town attracted great numbers of Straw-necked Ibis and Masked Lapwings, unconcerned by people or traffic. Once, when we stopped at the roadside to investigate a road kill - a Short-nosed Bandicoot - we noticed a small bird feeding a short distance away in a swampy drain. It seemed unfamiliar, and as we drew level and stopped the car a Chestnut-banded Rail ran off into a tunnel in the thick vegetation close by, but not before we had a good view of the beautiful plumage. It was there each day for almost a week until the water dried up. Later on whilst en route to the highway we saw others dash recklessly across the road, and also a Pheasant Coucal fluttering clumsily across and scrambling up the bank.

Along this road through the Pillar Valley to the highway there are always birds to be observed. After leaving the park boundaries the country is more open. Forest Kingfishers were common, usually on power lines, and occasionally we saw Squatter Pigeons. Once we came upon a large Wedge-tailed Eagle feeding on a kangaroo carcass in a paddock close to the road. Perched on a low stump close by, and patiently waiting a turn was a Sea Eagle. Later the Torresian Crows moved in - two days later, in fact!

The turn-offs to Diggers Rest and Minnie Waters are also on this road, a few kilometres out from Wooli. The best of the heathlands are accessible from these two camping and picnic areas. Both have good walking tracks and facilities. At this time of year the heathland flowers are outstanding with masses of colour and a great diversity of plants, most, alas, unknown to me,

though some were familiar from visits to Mallacoota Heathlands. I regretted my lack of botanical knowledge, and wished that someone like Ern or Rita was near at hand!

The Grafton office of NSW Parks and Wildlife supplied me with a full list of flora and fauna made in a survey of the Yuraygir early this year, but many of the plants had no common name, and I needed more time than was available to work on identification. One *Eremophila* shrub was completely new to me - a dainty pale green flower. The only listing of *Eremophila* is '*debilis*'. Sufficient to say that the Wooli area is a botanists' (and bird observers') paradise, and that there may be new discoveries yet to be made.

The Banksias I am more familiar with, and the *Banskia serratas* in full bloom at the Angophora Walk, Minnie Waters, attracted great numbers of nectar feeders. *Banksia marginata* and *B. ericafolia* we found all over the area, and the maniacal cackles of Noisy Friarbirds were everywhere!

Shirley Parnaby

Observations

• Margaret Badminton reports having seen a Rufous Songlark on the corner of the Newstead and South Muckleford Roads on Sept. 24.

• Natalie de Maccus reported a very early flowering of Rosy Hyacinth Orchid *Dipodium roseum*, at Croajigalong NP in September. Both species found there are usually Summer flowering.

• A Platypus was seen in the Coliban River at Redesdale near where it joins Lake Epparlock. Craig Moody

• Two Southern Boobooks appeared in their roosting tree at the Botanic Gardens early in April and remained there during winter. The proliferation of pellets indicated successful hunting, but during the first week of September one bird disappeared - probably to the nesting site - and at present the other remains, and very few pellets are to be found. Shirley Parnaby

• Shirley also reports that there are now two families of unwelcome Australian Ravens in their area - one at Buda, and the other in a large pine in the creek behind their house at 61 Hunter Street. The smaller birds are intimidated by their presence, unfortunately. She is wondering whether over-population of ravens at the landfill area has necessitated their movement to other parts of town.

• Seen on a very wildlife-friendly dam in Blakeley Road, 19/10/01 - 1 White-necked Heron, 1 Yellow-billed Spoonbill, 1 Little Pied Cormorant, 4 Great Black Cormorants, 2 Wood Ducks and an Intermediate Egret with breeding plumage and pinkish bill. Rita Mills (They have been there together several times since, too)

• Ern and Lesley Perkins had two Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos at their house at 27 Doveton Street on 24/10.

• The Spotted Pardalote nesting in Margaret Badminton's rockery seems to have been quite unaffected by the heavy rain.

• George Broadway reported a Black-shouldered Kite near their house in Wheeler St and the Clamorous Reed-warblers are back on the creek.

Wednesday Walks

Smiths Reef Track 3/10 Stuart Morris, our leader for the afternoon, had had a look at three or four locations and settled for this area, and despite the fact that the excursion was curtailed because of the sudden change in the weather, we were well satisfied. The first plants to catch our eye were the mounds of bright golden Tangled Guineaflower (*Hibbertia excuciates*). We soon found that the Rabbits Ears (*Thelymitra antenifera*) were there, but not in their usual abundance or size. In fact, most of these plants wouldn't have been above 10cm tall. We even found one tiny specimen of Crimson Sunorchid (*T. x macmillanii*). The other plants found in flower were - *Chamaescilla corombosa* (Blue Stars), Chocolate Lily, *Burchardia umbellata* (Milk Maids), *Bulbine bulbosa* (Bulbine Lily), *Dianella revoluta* (Black-anther Flax-lily), *Lomandra multiflora* (Many-flowered Mat-rush), *Grevillea alpina* (Cats Claws or Downy Grevillea) , *Dillwynia sericea* (Showy Parrot Pea), *Brachyloma daphnoides* (Daphne Heath), *Leucopogon virgata* (White Beard-heath), Yam-daisy, Billy Buttons, Golden, or Sticky, Everlasting, Waxlip Orchid, *Caladenia cuculata* (Hooded Caladenia), *Thelmitra pauciflora* (Slender Sunorchid), Rough Wattle, Slender Rice-flower, *Pimelea humilis* (Common Rice-flower), Drosera peltata ssp. *auriculata (Tall Sundew), Ranunculus sp.* (Buttercup), Pink Bells, Gold-dust Wattle and *Leptospermum myrsinoides* (Heath Ti-tree).

Specimen Gully Road, Barkers Creek. 10/10 John and Nina Cole were the leaders of our last Wednesday Walk for the season, and they took us first to a spot along the railway line just off Specimen Gully Road to show us a beautiful patch of flowers including a Diuris which proved to be D. *choreopsis* (Golden Moths) and Slender Sunorchid which had been out in flower when John checked at about 2 pm, but were closed by the time we got there. There was a wonderful show of *Pultenea pedunculata* (Mat Bush-pea). Also there were *Leptorhynchos squamatus* (Scaly Buttons), Sticky Everlasting, Chocolate Lilies and *Vellia paradoxa* (Spur Vellia).
Ian Johnson showed us around where the granite meets the sedimentary rock on the highest point of specimen Gully Road. Here we saw *Brachyloma daphnoides* (Daphne Heath), Bulbine Lilies, *Plantago varia* (Variable Plantain), Pink Bells, Candles, Common Riceflower, Slender Riceflower, Rough Bedstraw, Waxlip Orchids and Pink- fingers, Gold Dust Wattle, Hedge Wattle, Billy Buttons, Purple-leaf Fireweed, and *Melicrus urceolatus* (Urn Heath), which was the first I'd seen in the district for some years. There was also lots of Rock Fern.

On behalf of the Club, a very big **"Thank You"** to the leaders of this Spring's Wednesday Walks. Its been a learning experience for us all, whether finding new sites, new plants, etc. Most of the leaders were first timers, and have given us much pleasure as we've explored their chosen areas.

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 25/10

ROADSIDE CLEANUP, Sat, Nov. 10. Meet near Taits' Carriages at 9am. It should take about an hour. Gloves, rubbish bags supplied (but grocery bags are very convenient to carry and put your smaller rubbish in). Note VicRoads do not allow a cleanup to take place if it is foggy or raining.

Booking forms and information for the **March Campout** near Kyneton will be available at the November meeting.

PROGRAM

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days. **Also note** that outdoor events are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.

Business Meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Fri. Nov. 9. **Farming with the Future in View**. Geraldine and Geoff Harris will tell us what they are doing for conservation and farming on their property at Barkers Creek. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat Nov. 10 **Highway Cleanup** - meet at the corner of Willy Milly Road near Taits' Carriages at 9am. More details p. 7

Sat Nov. 10 A look around the **Harris Property**. Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30 sharp. Take afternoon tea.

Fri. Dec. 14 **Members and Visitors Night.** Your night to bring the club a short talk, a few slides, a book review, etc., etc. Start thinking. "Bring a plate" Christmas Supper. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Dec. 15 **Far-side of Cairn Curran** - excursion and BYO picnic tea. Leave 13 Mostyn Street at **3.30pm.** A telescope will be available, thanks to Margaret Badminton. Note time change.

Fri. Feb. 9 Annual Meeting UCA hall, 8pm.

Fri. 8 - Mon. 11 Mar. 02. **VFNCA Campout** based at Campaspe Downs Country Resort at Tylden near Kyneton. Theme of the Camp is **Volcanoes and Mineral Springs of Central Victoria**. Copies of the Information and Registration forms available at the November meeting.

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Articles for the Newsletter can be left at Tonks Bros or posted to RSD 181, 118 Blakeley Rd., Castlemaine, 3450. If you are sending it on a floppy disk Lotus Word Pro and Rich Text are best, Wordpad and Word for Windows 97 are useful. Ed.

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Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club.

2001 Committee E. Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C. Morris (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.). ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Dredge, M. Oliver, B. Maund, B. Envall.

Subscriptions for 2001 -

Ordinary Membership: Single ,$22 Family, $30

Pensioner or student: Single $19 Family $24 Supporting: $31

The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.

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